A BRIEF HISTORY OF LEADERSHIP
Additional Handout for Leadership Matters

INTRODUCTION

For as long as there have been people there have been leaders. The words 'leader' and 'leadership' may not be in our concordances, but we can all think of Old Testament leaders – Moses, David, Deborah, Nehemiah. Reflection on leadership can be found in writings of the Greeks and Romans and in Western literature of the last 2000 years. In the Church, there has been recent interest in the Rule of St Benedict (sixth Century) as a source of wisdom on how to lead. However, research on leadership is relatively new, starting in the early 20th century.

'GREAT MAN'/ TRAIT THEORIES

The earliest studies (1920s) assumed that effective leaders were born, not made, and set out to identify certain characteristics. So research looked at what characteristics are shared by great leaders, so that these factors could be used when selecting leaders. Leaders were seen as exceptional men who possessed innate characteristics such as intelligence, energy and dominance.

BEHAVIOURIST

Attention turned in the 1940s from 'who leaders are' to 'what leaders do'. Research asked subordinates questions about their bosses' behaviour, and identified two essential aspects of leadership:

- Providing clear instructions and directions (task-oriented leadership behaviour), and
- Giving personal support and encouragement (relationship-oriented leadership behaviour).

Focusing on these two behaviours was believed to make people good leaders.

CONTINGENCY/ SITUATIONAL

In the 1960s and 1970s thinkers on leadership went in another direction. Perhaps effective leadership involves doing the right thing at the right time. The most widely-used of 'contingency' approaches, 'Situational Leadership', was developed by Dr Paul Hersey and Dr Kenneth Blanchard (1988). By using a model to assess the willingness and capability of followers to do a job, managers can determine what combination of task and relationship behaviour will be most effective in a particular situation (see Relational Leadership p.36-41). Another example is John Adair (1973) whose model identifies three strands of leadership: task, team, and individuals; good leaders need to focus on all three, but may need more emphasis on one of these according to different situations.

TRANSACTIONAL TO TRANSFORMATIONAL

A political historian, James McGregor Burns studied great leaders in politics and history (e.g. Napoleon, Churchill, Martin Luther King) and what it was that made them successful. In his 1978 book, Leadership, Burns explains the difference between leaders who create visions to transform followers and societies, and leaders who get followers to do as the leader wishes by means of a transaction, i.e. money, praise or some other reward (or punishment). At best, transactional leaders get what they expect, while transformational leaders get performance beyond expectations. Transformational leadership is a strong element in the understanding of leadership today. Transformational leaders inspire those around by providing meaning, optimism and vision. They encourage their followers to question assumptions, reframe problems and be creative and innovative. They try to understand their followers' needs and desires and see it as their duty to help their followers realise their potential. This is very different from the more hierarchical 'command and control' model which it has replaced in most spheres of leadership.

STRANDS OF LEADERSHIP THINKING TODAY

Currently there is an explosion of research and new strands of thinking on leadership, including work on women as leaders. For example:

- Leadership and the New Science, Margaret Wheatley, Berrett-Koehler, 1999.
- Good to Great, Jim Collins, Random House, 2001.
- One Thing You Need to Know, Marcus Buckingham, Simon and Schuster, 2005.
- Enlightened Power: How Women are Transforming the Practice of Leadership, Linda Couglin, Ellen Wingard, Keith Holliham (eds), Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Leadership Next, Eddie Gibbs, IVP, 2006.
- Through the Labyrinth, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, Harvard Business School Press, 2007.
- Executive Intelligence: What All Great Leaders Have, Justin Menkes, Collins, 2005.
- The New Psychology of Leadership, Haslam, Reicher and Platow, Psychology Press 2011.